DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 148 CE 036 720

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TITLE Institutional Strategies for Providing Innovation to the Learning Community.
PUB DATE 14 Nov 82
NOTE 13p.; Presented at the National Adult Education Conference (San Antonio, TX, November 12-16, 1982).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Colleges; *Continuing Education; *Educational Innovation; *Educational Needs; Educational Planning; Higher Education; *Institutional Role; Leadership; *Technological Advancement; Universities

ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher education must develop a strategy and capacity for self-renewal through innovation. Strong leadership is required to respond to off-campus constituent needs without loss of power. Awareness of problems associated with innovation is essential. Such problems are the failure to anticipate failure, assumption that innovation would flow naturally if artificial barriers were removed, unanticipated opposition to innovation, the specialized role of the innovator, and the imitative quality of much of the innovation in higher education. The continuing education professional has the responsibility to choose the appropriate innovation. Technology's high rate of impact and diffuseness in contemporary society will continue to generate the need for continuing education throughout the industrial and governmental sectors. The major innovative approaches to continuing education will require much institutional planning and additional costs. Possible financing approaches are contracts, mass marketing, consortiums, grants, gifts, delivery charges, fees, and exchange agreements. Some strategies to assist the continuing educator/innovator to achieve institutional support and guarantee successful implementation include creating a climate for implementation, weighing costs, watching the timing, building credibility, addressing one's strengths, testing and evaluating, building on existing foundations, being productive, remembering institutional purpose and mission, and maintaining quality. (YLB)

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INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING INNOVATION TO THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

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PREPARED FOR

1982 NATIONAL ADULT EDUCATION CONFERENCE

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

NOVEMBER 14, 1982

CE036720

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INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING
INNOVATION TO THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

The theme for this year's conference, "Innovation in the Learning Community" is most appropriate, since it marks a historical innovation of its own which is taking place between the two conference sponsors, AEA and NAPCAE. The merger of these two professional adult education organizations will result in a new association, the AAACE. Perhaps a sign should be erected in the hotel lobby which expresses the dynamic nature of the interaction taking place today, "Innovation in Progress."

Developing a Capacity for Self-Renewal

Innovation is critically important to the continued growth of any organization. The introduction of a new element into a structure includes a sense of novelty and a degree of creativity. The need for and importance of innovation was well identified and articulated a number of years ago by John W. Gardner in his book, Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society. Gardner explained: "When organizations and societies are young, they are flexible, fluid, not yet paralyzed by rigid specialization and willing to try anything once. As the organization or society ages, vitality diminishes, flexibility gives way to rigidity, creativity fades and there is a loss of capacity to meet challenges from unexpected directions."[1]

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[1]John W. Gardner, Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1965), p. 3.

As we think about the challenges facing higher education in the next decade, and as institutions struggle to maintain their strength and vitality, we must realize how important it is for us to develop both a strategy and capacity for self-renewal, so that the fruits and rewards of innovation can be harnessed for the betterment of the institution.

The need and the opportunity for innovation has never been greater. That need should not cause us, however, to embrace just any new idea, but to think carefully about our own institution's present identity and mission and to plan appropriately, so that there is reasonable success from our efforts. The best type of innovation is that which has continuity and which brings the results of change into line with our purposes. As Gardner says, "In the ever-renewing society what matures is a system or framework within which continuous innovation, renewal and rebirth can occur."[2]

A Call for Leadership

There is a steady erosion taking place in the ability of continuing education units to respond to off-campus constituency needs. This loss of power and flexibility on the part of the university cannot be allowed to continue. As the Carnegie Commission report, The Control of the Campus, points out, "The ever-increasing role of outside agencies in campus matters is gradually wearing down internal governance structures....As leadership is diminished, power and initiative flow even more rapidly to bureaucracies outside."[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 5.

[3] Malcolm G. Scully, "Universities Urged to Reassert Their Right to Govern Themselves," The Chronicle of Higher Education, xxv, (October 13, 1982), p. 1.

The report is critical of state agencies "for demanding greater accountability from public colleges and universities without providing them with the flexibility needed to respond to economic hard times."[4] Specialized accrediting associations also are singled out in the report, particularly for exerting undue pressures on the institutions to protect vested interests. These pressures are often applied "not to protect the public and promote excellence, but to gain leverage in the competition for limited resources."[5]

The Commission's report calls upon higher education for a rebirth of leadership. The responsibility for maintaining a strong and vital organization is even more important today than in the past. It is at this juncture that innovation assumes major significance. To make a new program, instructional delivery method or other innovation technique meaningful, however, requires careful strategy prior to implementation.

'Learning from the Failures of Innovation

Before we discuss strategy, the seasoned educator might offer a word of caution to the young and inexperienced about the limitations of good intentions. To paraphrase Cameron Fincher, one of the most interesting aspects of innovation is that the unanticipated and unintended outcomes may be more significant than those planned. Fincher examines a number of failures of innovation in a recent article in the journal of Research in Higher Education. He points out that we can learn from these mistakes if we are willing to examine them closely. His five major ideas are:

1. Many innovations fail because of the failure to anticipate failure.

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[4] Ibid., p. 2.

[5] Ibid.

2. There is an assumption that innovation will flow naturally if artificial barriers were removed...

3. Opposition to innovation is easy to underestimate because it is so passive and because it will not be triggered until the innovator least expects it.

4. The roles of initiators and implementors in innovation are specialized roles that often defeat the purposes of innovation.

5. Innovation in higher education is more imitative than imaginative.[6]

Let's look at each of these points more closely. First, the failure to anticipate failure. Fincher reminds us that subjectivity of perception frequently causes the innovator to perceive the need which may or may not be real. Don't innovate merely for the novelty. When assessing the success of the innovation, take into account some of the things learned from the effort. In some cases, says Fincher, "Partial success may well make the innovation worth its failure--if intelligent reasons can be given for both the success and the failure."[7]

Second, the often unwarranted assumption that innovation would flow naturally if artificial barriers were removed. Although ineffectiveness cannot always be blamed on faculty stubbornness or disposition associated with faculty rank, be alert to the fact that "passive resistance to change has long been elevated to an art form."[8] Recognizing the reality of resistance to change and planning strategically to deal with that resistance even before it surfaces will move us one step closer to success.

This leads us to Fincher's third point, that is, unanticipated opposition to innovation. Because opposition is so passive, it is

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[6]Cameron Fincher, "The Failures of Innovation," Research in Higher Education, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1980), pp. 373-376.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

often underestimated. "Cooperation is given freely, as long as it does not cost anything."[9] The change from passive resistance to active opposition is frequently activated by the financial impact of the planned change. Calculate the costs realistically. Don't try to bury the actual costs under the rug. Another shortcoming of innovative proposals is that they are seldom tied to the organization's incentive-and-reward system. Supporters of innovation often withdraw their support and cooperation when they calculate their actual costs and benefits.

One of the most interesting and least often discussed problems associated with innovation arises out of the specialized role played by the innovator. That is Fincher's fourth point. Innovators are rarely the implementors. In some cases, this works towards program improvement; in some cases, it does not. There are different skills and qualities needed to perform each of these roles effectively, and they are rarely combined in the same person. When they are, as Fincher points out, this combination of talents may threaten too many people which then exerts pressure on the individual to avoid repeating his creative function.

Finally, the fifth point which was discussed briefly earlier, that is, the imitative quality of much of the innovation which exists in higher education. Fincher calls this the perversity of higher education, that ambitious institutions will eagerly try to duplicate the mistakes of their prestigious elders. He warns that because Harvard, Chicago or Berkeley have failed gloriously is not good reason for another institution to espouse the same objectives.

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[9] Ibid.

He does leave us on an optimistic note, however, when he concludes that an innovation's reason-for-being may ultimately revolve around completely unanticipated and totally unintended outcomes. This does not negate its worth, but reminds us humbly that careful planning never assures absolute control, and for that matter, perhaps it should not.

A Need for Commitment

We have pointed out the need for innovation in institutions of higher education in general, and the particular need for their incorporation into the structure of postsecondary education at this juncture in history. Choice and selection of appropriate innovation now becomes the responsibility of the continuing education professional. Many of you are the directors of innovative programs yourselves, and you have been listening with ironic understanding to the problems which were outlined. Yet you have shown the courage to move forward in spite of the risks involved. You have taken an informed approach to the rewards and hazards of your profession and have chosen to deal with both the realities as well as the dreams.

Knowing full well the consequences of inaction and recognizing the competition faced by higher education from the private sector, your choice has been to re-examine your institutional purpose--the generation, transmission and dissemination of knowledge. You have freed yourselves from the self-serving bureaucracy that clings to the past and prevents self-renewal.

I know all of you would agree with me whether you have undertaken to innovate yourselves or to support an innovation, that you wish to be associated with those institutions which have the vision necessary to make the transition required to stay in the business of providing education, that is by examining new ways, new times and

new populations. That is basically why we are attending this conference, to learn from each other, to explore what works and to subject to close scrutiny each of the new ideas and approaches offered. Your job requires you to counter the prevailing institutional approach to hard times, which is retrenchment. Each of you recognizes that those institutions which define their primary business as traditional on-campus degree programs for full-time students will do so until their doors close.

The Potential for Innovation

You all know that the need for continuing education is burgeoning throughout the industrial and governmental sectors of our society. Technology's high rate of impact and diffuseness in our society will continue to generate that need throughout the balance of the century. Some of you are already harnessing that very technology to meet the educational needs it generates. One example of that innovation which requires the ability to handle high risk is the utilization of satellites to deliver live educational programs around the world. The hardware and expertise is already there. The question is not one of technical capability, but rather of economics, attitudes and ability to think creatively. Russell G. Mawby pointed out at the 1982 NUCEA Conference in Cincinnati that the "challenge in the utilization of new technology lies with the human element, both teacher and learner."[10]

As an earth station owner, I can receive and view programs from any part of the world. The only restriction is that the signals

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[10]Russell G. Mawby, "Changing Ground Rules for American Higher Education," paper presented at the 67th Annual Conference of the National University Continuing Education Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 6, 1982.

be carried by one of the satellites in the Western hemisphere which covers the United States and Canada. If this conference had been telecast by an uplink to the Westar IV Satellite, I could have stayed at home and viewed the proceedings with a much smaller investment in cost and time.

The most recent large-scale strategy for the delivery of credit-free programs via telecommunication is the National University Teleconference Network. Seventy colleges across the country have joined together with the potential of offering conferences and workshops to a national audience. The first experimental video program of the network to be carried by satellite is scheduled for January, 1983.

Hotels, businesses and governmental agencies are moving into the telecommunications era in rapid fashion. Some businesses are utilizing satellites for computer data transmission, facsimile transmissions and teleconferencing. For example, Texas Instruments installed downlinks at all twenty-two of their locations in the United States. This year their annual stockholders meeting was transmitted by satellite to all locations. Think of the educational opportunities in this situation. An institution like SIUC could deliver live, inservice training from its campus to any segment of Texas Instruments employees at all twenty-two locations.

Financing Innovative Programs

This is, of course, only one example of innovative approaches to continuing education. It is perhaps one of the more dramatic ones. Each of us recognizes that such major innovation requires a great deal of institutional planning. And that leads to our next topic. In these times when the costs of traditional delivery are so high, the first question of the central administration is "how do you propose to finance this program?" The second is "what guarantee

do you have for me that it will not place an added drain on the university's already constrained resources?" This is asked of any new program or approach, no matter how small or how grandiose.

Following are a number of possible approaches to financing innovative programs for your consideration:

- Contracts--Partial and Full Recovery
- Mass Marketing
- Consortiums
- Inter-institutional Bartering--exchange of goods & services without money
- Grants
- Private Gifts
- Sale of Products
- Product Amortization
- Delivery Charges
- Fees
- Equalization of Tuition and Fees
- Exchange Agreements

Selected Strategies

Recognizing the problems faced by the innovator leads us to examination of some useful strategies which will assist the continuing educator to achieve support within the institution for his approach and to guarantee successful implementation once the program becomes a reality:

1. Create a climate for innovation--creativity must be nourished.
2. Do your research--Base your assessments and plans on facts, not impulses.
3. Weigh the costs--Costs can be more than money.
4. Watch your timing--Great innovations have failed due to poor timing; poor ones have succeeded because of great timing.
5. Build your credibility--Learn to swim in calm waters before jumping into swift currents.

6. Play to your strengths--Do the things you do best.

7. Play the combinations--Gather the people and resources suitable for the task.

8. Test and evaluate--Pretest or field test when possible; evaluate and modify as needed.

9. Move in unison--Don't get ahead of those from whom you need support.

10. Don't be greedy--Projects fail because people are unwilling to share.

11. Read the politics--Don't embarrass those above you, and don't fight the impossible.

12. Build on existing foundations--Take advantage of previous gains.

13. Watch for intrinsic rewards--People have lots of reasons for participating and supporting an activity.

14. Go for continuity--Forget the novelty; look to the long run.

15. Be productive--There must be a measure of return on investment.

16. Remember institutional purpose and mission--Don't get too far out of line.

17. Know thyself--Know your own strengths and limitations.

18. Project revenue base--Will you be solvent at the end of the program?

19. Maintain quality--Keep your integrity. Don't be associated with substandard programs.

20. Think alternatives--Decisions cannot be made without selections.

In conclusion, I would like to leave with you one story. When Alexander the Great was elected captain-general by the general assembly of the Greeks, many statesmen and philosophers came to congratulate him. Alexander had hoped that the philosopher, Diogenes, would be one of those present to congratulate him, but he was not. When Alexander went to see him and to ask if there was anything he could do for the

Greek teacher, Diogenes replied, "Only stand a little out of my sunshine."[12]

Perhaps the most important thing we can do as continuing education leaders is to stand out of the light of the innovative and creative men and women in our organization.

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[12]Edward C. Lindeman, ed., Life Stories of Men Who Shaped History from Plutarch's Lives. (New York: Mentor, 1950), p. 173.